

Life with Freedom

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[0 : 00] Okay, we're going to go back for a little while this morning to Romans chapter 8 that we've just read. If you're visiting with us today in our morning worship, we're looking through Romans.

We looked at it before the summer and then we took it up after the summer and we're looking at chapters 5.5 through to the end of 11 right up until the end of the year.

And last week we wrestled together as Thomas preached on this difficult passage in Romans chapter 7 about the battle that there is for us as Christians.

And we're going to follow on from that today by looking at the first. We're going to spend a few weeks in Romans chapter 8, it's one of the best chapters in the whole Bible.

And I think one of the reasons we struggle as Christians sometimes, struggle with the Christian faith and maybe even struggle with church and worship, is that it's very difficult for us not to deal with the big issues of life as Christians.

[1 : 07] And it can be tough for us to always be focusing on the really big issues of life and death. The Bible is full of teaching about life and death and the significance and meaning and reason.

And you might find that tough sometimes because all of us sometimes find it unnerving and we're looking for a quiet life and we can sometimes just avoid talking about these things.

We'll find that when we're in our general chat. We're not so good at going into deep and meaningful and in many ways we try and avoid them in our lives, maybe especially the men among us, because that is a struggle.

But yeah, it's hugely significant to found a struggle on really great and wonderful good news. Last week we looked at the struggle of being a Christian and the internal battle between doing what we hated and didn't want to do but having this love of Christ and the desire of Christ within us, that internal conflict.

And what helps us through these battles is knowing that we are loved and recognizing the Christian life is a life of daily joy. You may have noticed my emphasis on that in our prayers today.

[2 : 25] And at the end of Romans chapter 15, Paul speaks about joy. It's very important to him. And he says this because he wants people to be full of joy in 15 verse 13.

He gives us benediction, which I'll use at the end of the service. May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing. And also in verse 32 of that same chapter, he speaks about the importance of having joy.

May there be joy and refreshment in our company together. And joy really is what comes all towards the end of this letter, and he speaks about it in other places as well, as what's really important for us as Christians to bed us in when we are struggling with battle.

And so you may say, well, why doesn't it feel very joyful? Why don't I feel very good in my Christian life, which is often the case?

And it may be that our minds are not fixed in the right place, and we therefore have a wrong view of God and a wrong view of ourselves.

[3 : 39] So for a few moments in this chapter, I want to think about these early verses of Romans chapter 8, which is the foundation for our Christian lives. It's the ground that we stand on.

It's what enables us to be joyful when we think of the internal battles and struggles we often have and the difficulties, maybe externally as well.

And I simply want to highlight two things for us as Christians today. And if you're not a Christian, this can be yours in Jesus Christ. First thing is there is no condemnation.

There is no condemnation. And the second thing is there is freedom. Okay? So we are going to talk about the big things, and we are going to deal with these issues because they interface with our daily lives, with the everyday mentality that we go into the day with.

And secondly, there is no condemnation. It's a great verse in the New Testament, isn't it? At the end of all these deep theological unfolding of our condition before God in the glory of the gospel, He says, there is therefore now no condemnation for those in Jesus Christ.

[4 : 50] So what am I saying? What do we say? What do you go from here today thinking? I don't need to prove myself.

That's what it means. Therefore in Christ there is no condemnation. It means we don't need to prove ourselves day in and day out when we get out of bed and when we go and do what we do. Because isn't that what is the mindset that so often entraps and we spend our lives thinking over? Am I good enough?

Do I work hard enough? Am I pretty enough? It's not me, obviously. Am I funny enough? Am I competent enough? Am I decent enough?

And we're spending our lives constantly proving ourselves, wanting to prove ourselves, wanting to be better, wanting to be right with somebody.

[5 : 48] And often our lack or low self-esteem as people is because we have this weight of failure and guilt and pressure to be something and to prove ourselves.

And that spills in our Christian thinking so that often we think that God loves us as long as we, as it's dependent on how good we do.

But God is saying, look, you don't slip in and out of condemnation as a Christian. You're not condemned to one day because you have a bad day and you're innocent the next day. There is now, therefore, there is therefore now.

Now it's happened. There's no condemnation. The verdict on us has been passed by God the judge as we come to Him in Jesus Christ.

He has, God finds nothing against us because of Jesus. As believers we have a new, you know that, we've discussed this, we've preached on it from this time.

[6 : 47] We have nothing, we have a new standing before God. We don't need to prove ourselves today to God, to other Christians, to the minister, to your wife, to your husband.

We are not condemned. We don't need to prove ourselves. And how can it be? How can that be? Well, of course, that's the focus of our worship today. It's the focus of our worship every time we meet.

But it's specifically the focus when we have the Lord's Supper together because we recognize what God has done. How can it be? Well, because in verse 3 we say, God has done it.

That's why there's no condemnation. Now you need, and I need to get that into my head, that God has done it. Verse 3, God has done what the law weakened by the flesh could not do by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh for sin.

He condemned sin in the flesh. So what have we got? we've got no condemnation, and we've got condemnation. We are not condemned. Our sin is condemned in Jesus.

[7 : 51] There's this opposites come together in this passage. So what we have and are reminded of, and you need to remember, and I need to remember, God doesn't just talk a good game.

He doesn't just talk a good game. You know, we talk about God as the living word, and we speak about the Bible, and we talk about the law of God and the Ten Commandments, and we have done. And the prophets say, thus says the Lord. But He's done more than that, hasn't He? He doesn't just talk a good game. He has acted on our behalf.

Now just as an aside, I think that's often where we fail as Christians, isn't it? We talk a good game. Sometimes not such a good game, but sometimes we talk a good game spiritually, but we don't let grace govern our hands and our feet and our mouths and our actions.

But that's not like God. God talks a good game, but God has done it. What has He done? Well God has sent His Son Jesus Christ.

[8 : 58] And Jesus, you know, in that lovely little verse there, we have the summary of the atoning work of Jesus Christ on the cross, that He has become one of us. God, the infinite and eternal one, becomes flesh.

And He condemns your sin and my sin in Himself on the cross so that we might belong. And then He sends His Spirit into the lives of every believer.

That's where we have belonging when we know and come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. You know that. That's what we celebrate when we celebrate.

That's what we remember in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is what changes us. But I want to ask, did they really have to do that?

Did they have to do that? Well, what He says here, He says, God has done what the law and ourselves weakened by the flesh could not do.

[10:04] Did they have to do it? We were powerless to do anything. This is the one divine initiative that there is in the universe.

This is the one way God has said. Finally God the Father sends the Son, goes and the Spirit indwells. There's this clear, trinitarian conclave that has happened before the creation of the world in order with all the mystery of that to provide the way of salvation.

There's a fantastic picture in Revelation 5. You get time, go home and read it. Revelation 5. You've got this amazing symbolism and pictures in this great last book of the Bible and awesome stories which speak about real history and real realities and real future.

And you've got this scroll in Revelation 5 which really symbolizes God's eternal plan of salvation. And it says, who is worthy to open the scroll?

And the author says, there's no one. There's no mighty angel. There's no one in heaven and on earth. And John, as he hears that, no one, no one, no one.

[11:27] He weeps and he weeps and he weeps because there's no one who's worthy to do this great work until we have this, I will go, the lion of the tribe of Judah, the Lamb of God, this great paradoxical mixed metaphor of Jesus Christ, the lion of the tribe of Judah.

He is the one who is worthy. Jesus Christ, is there another way? Is there any hint of another way in Scripture? Can you bring another way of salvation to us?

Did God not have come in the person of Jesus and lived and died and rose again? Just before the cross, he says, this cup, can I not pass from it?

Is there not another way of salvation? Can Derek Lammon not get another way to get to heaven? Does it really have to be through what I'm going to do right now on the cross?

I say, ah, but not my will. But yours be done. Because God, the Son knows that there's no other way. He had to face the cross, the death and the resurrection that we've remembered in the Lord's Supper is the only way.

[12:40] And can I just say as we think about that, and I hope you go and think about it as we participate in not too long a time, that the cross, it subsumes every reality that makes us human.

It involves every passion, every thought, every reality that you experience, and I experience day in, day out. It encompasses all the themes of our lives that a million Hollywood films would try and cover also.

Themes of love and of loss, of hope, of darkness, of death, of encouragement, forsakenness, suffering, injustice, justice, family, the greatest love, guilt, innocence, poverty, mystery, divinity, power, weakness, purpose, despair, hope, tears, and inexpressible joy.

All of these things, all of these things we can find in the cross and find in what is happening at the cross. All the realities that you wrestle with day to day, we find them being dealt with and finding their solution and hope in the cross.

So that we can say today, no condemnation. You don't need to prove yourself before God. Christ is our sin offering.

[14:00] He has fully met His own just requirements of perfection in Himself and yet taken our failed abilities on Himself in punishment.

And in Him, as you remember that as a Christian, you will stand before Him in judgment. You will say no condemnation.

There is no condemnation. We are accepted. We will not on that day need to prove ourselves because we are covered in the righteousness of Jesus, our sin condemned in Him.

That's why it matters. That's why we talk about the big things. That's why we refocus weekly on these things because ultimately flower arranging won't cut it.

We need to know and think of and remember these huge issues. We're innocent, no condemnation. That's the first thing.

[15:04] And the second thing I want to speak briefly about is freedom. Freedom because that is very much the theme of this section and also the word generally.

And you take the first two verses as summarizing this whole section. We've looked at the verse one which is no condemnation. And then verse two says, for the law of the spirit of life has set you free

in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.

The law of the spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus. So it's always remembering who Christ Jesus is because it's in Christ Jesus there's freedom.

And so we spring back to a couple of statements that Jesus made in the gospels where He said, I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

You know that very well known verse from John 14. But also from John 8 where Jesus says, know the truth. He says I am the truth. He says, know the truth, know me.

[16:08] He says, and the truth will set you free. And that all feeds into this description of the freedom that we have as Christians in Jesus Christ.

You see the only place that is freedom, and I'm not very good at getting this across. I tried a couple of weeks ago and I failed miserably. The only place where there's freedom is where there's truth. Isn't that right? You can only be free if you're facing and if you know truth. If we don't know the truth in our lives, then we find ourselves wallowing in that kind of web of deceit and duplicity and lies and cover-ups.

It's what we increasingly experience in a society which has abandoned any kind of absolute truth and any real truth so that there isn't anything you can found and call truth.

So we are finding ourselves with the phenomenon of fake news and alternative truth. People will not say that they will deny lying by saying there's an alternative truth and our politicians quite often are exemplary in that way, some more than others.

[17:30] And fake news and the reality of the world we live in, what, you know, if Pilate was around today he would ask the same question, wouldn't he? What is truth?

If truth is only within us, if there is no truth out there, if truth is only something that's subjective, then everything is truth and nothing is truth and everything is permissible and nothing is forbidden, isn't that right?

If there is no standard, if there is no truth, if there is no objectivity, then anything goes. And Jesus says, I am the truth. He claims the truth.

He claims to be the expression of the truth and the reality of the truth and only knowing Him will we be set free because the truth sets us free. Christ claims to be the standard bearer, the revealer, the author, the genesis of truth as truth is the standard by which we are judged.

And it's only when we acknowledge Him and confess our self-deception and our cover, God in His righteousness, can we be free to be honest about ourselves and free to be forgiven and released from condemnation and empowered to live in the truth, which is freedom.

[19:00] That's what we are told that it is in Christ and following Christ and in the Spirit we find true freedom. What does that freedom look like? What does true freedom look like as it's revealed to us here in Scripture?

Well it's God in us, isn't it? God in us. God in our lives. Verse 9, you, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit. If in fact God dwells in you, it's God in us.

It's being in Christ. It's the indwelling Spirit of God. God lives this new principle of life. Jesus has been born from above, Christ came and gives us a new beginning in order to be holy, in order to live according to the Spirit.

So this is an interesting fact. Jesus came, Jesus came died for you and for me to be holy. We don't think that sometimes, do we?

We think Jesus Christ came to forgive us and all these things, which is all right. But He came to help us to live according to the Spirit. That is to be holy. So our holiness is His goal.

[20:08] In coming to walk on the paths and the ground in Galilee is to make us whole. To be nailed to a tree, to make us holy, to know what it is, to have God's Spirit in order to be distinct, to be like Him, to be set apart for Him.

We're to live according to the Spirit of God. Now if we don't have the Spirit and evidence of God's Spirit, we don't belong.

Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to Him. So there's a solemnity about that for us this morning. What is your profession? What's my profession?

What do we believe? What we need to believe and know and experience is the freedom that comes from the Spirit in our lives. That resurrection power to overcome in the internal battles that we face and to recognize that what we have is already eternal life.

So that if we die today, if I die today, my body goes in the grave, but the sting of death has been removed. I continue to live in my Spirit with Christ and my body will be resurrected to a newness of life, a spiritual body at that last great day.

[21 : 31] So it means God in us, it means spiritual life and peace, which he speaks about in verse 6, for the mindset on the flesh is death, but the mindset on the Spirit is life and peace.

So we have this great reality of tension and newness and blessing and peace and life.

Yes, what we recognize is that there is a hostility towards God in our sinful, defeated natures, that's important to recognize and that hostility towards God fights against the life of the Spirit in us, but that is ameliorated for us when we recognize that he offers us strength and that peace of knowing him.

As part of that is then going from here and being an encourager and speaking kind words, because what does kind words do? Kind words turn away wrath.

And we seek, as Paul says in Romans 12 later on in the more practical bits about this, as long as much as it's up to us, live at peace with everyone, because peace is the fruit of the sin-dwelling Spirit and it's the freedom.

[22 : 57] We are not bound by our sinful natures, by our enmity towards God and towards one another. And lastly, it means our desires change also.

Verse 5, you know, for those who live according to the flesh, set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit.

So there's this whole thing about desires here and that's the crunch. I think this is where we really miss out on joy and it's where we miss out on the core of it for ourselves, that maybe we don't see the need to change our desires.

Our desires are okay, they're fine, no problem. And maybe we resist God's work within us or we don't ask God to help us change our desires.

And the result is we're miserable. There's nothing more miserable than a Christian who's a Christian but don't really want to be and their desires haven't changed, but somehow they're gritting their teeth, gritting their teeth Christians.

[23 : 56] How often are we like that? We're gritting our teeth Christians. It's all a bit forced and medicinal. It must be good. It should be good some of the people and we're gritting our teeth but there's not much joy.

There's a lot of legalism and there's a lot of law keeping but it's not with a changed heart. It's not desiring what God desires and it's not living according to the Spirit from within our soul because we have not recognized the internal battle.

And it's recognizing that fundamental, the two mindsets that there is, the mindset against God and the mindset that is a new mindset that is for God and that is a miracle for us in our lives.

And that means at least two things. If we are going to have a new heart, new desires which gives us a foundation of joy rather than joyless, grumpy Christianity.

It means at least two things. With this we close. One, it means keeping in step with the Spirit. We must keep in step with the Spirit. In verse 4 he talks about we are to walk according to the Spirit.

[25 : 09] And Galatians 5, beautifully, you could slip Galatians 5 into this passage right here because it speaks about the importance of keeping in step with the Spirit and what it means.

That whole passage in Galatians is a further exposition of the freedom in Christ. And he's really saying it's like a bit of a three-legged race in that sense.

I know it's not a great illustration. But there is that. If we're in a three-legged race we need to be cooperating, we need to be submitting and just working together with the person beside you.

And if you love them, then all the better. And in Christ it's keeping in step with the Spirit and having this desire to follow Him and obey Him and knowing Him and knowing why He's good and knowing the life and the peace and the freedom we have in Him.

Martin Lloyd-Jones who wrote a huge amount of pages about Romans, like volumes and sermons. He would preach like three words on a sermon that lasted for about 130 years, the series on Romans.

[26 : 21] But he preached fantastic sermons and wonderful insights. But he said when he's speaking about the difference between serving and keeping in step with the Spirit because our hearts are changed, he said, it's like the difference between breaking a parking law as someone and breaking your marriage vows.

You break a parking law, it's a kind of legalistic thing, it's a law of the state, you don't feel tremendously moved in your heart by it. But when you break faith with your wife or your husband, it's law-breaking at that level.

But it's hurtful because it's someone you love. And it's someone that you've given your love to and your life to. And there's this, can you see the difference between the two in that relationship? And that is as we keep in step with the Spirit, that is where we begin to see the importance of obedience from desire rather than duty.

So it's keeping in step with the Spirit. And as we do so, it's reminding ourselves that the primary battle for us as Christians today is internal.

[27 : 39] It's an internal battle. See verse 9 says, you, however, are not on the flesh but in the Spirit. If in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you, it's about you and you as a being, as an internal being, as a real being.

And the primary battleground is who we are, the philosophy of like, you know, when it speaks about changing our mind, it's not just intellectual, it's not just our brain.

It's the mind as the seat of the will and of the emotions and of everything so that we change that and it becomes the core of our life. And that's the, you know, the mind is what preoccupies us, what we spend our time and our energies on our thinking, our motivation, and that's an invisible work, isn't it?

You're not going to come into churches and say, oh, I can see Spirit of God's really working and that guy's mind, that girl's mind. It's impossible. It's still miraculous, still incredibly powerful because it's the life of the Spirit transforming our desires.

Can you change your desires? Can I? No, it's recognizing. This is the Spirit of God at work in us, in our daily walk, daily learning, daily prayer, rechanneling the control center of our lives, our basic nature, our internal life with God so that on a daily basis you're not saying, I wish my circumstances would change or I wish other people would change, however much we desire that.

[29 : 17] We're saying, I know that the Spirit of God miraculously needs to change me and my desires.

That is where I think we will find joy in our Christian lives. Amen.